

What is claimed is:


1. A poly(vinyl alcohol) fabric produced by a method comprising the consecutive steps of:
 - a. supporting a plurality of poly(vinyl alcohol) fibers on a mesh screen to form a web;
 - b. pressure liquid entangling the web; and
 - c. drying the web.
2. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the pressure liquid entangling is performed with water.
3. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the method further comprises, after step a, the steps of
 - a. cross-lapping the web; and
 - b. stretching the web in the machine direction.
4. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the method further comprises, after step c, winding the web onto a roll.
5. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the pressure liquid entangling is performed at a water pressure of from about 20 to about 120 bar.
6. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the drying is performed at a temperature that exceeds the water solubility temperature of the poly(vinyl alcohol).
7. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the drying is performed by passing heated air through the web.
8. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the poly(vinyl alcohol) has a degree of polymerization of from about 1200 to about 2000.
9. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the poly(vinyl alcohol) has a degree of hydrolysis greater than 80%.
10. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the poly(vinyl alcohol) has a degree of hydrolysis greater than 98%.
11. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the poly(vinyl alcohol) fibers have an average denier of from about 1 to about 3 denier.
12. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the poly(vinyl alcohol) fibers have an average length of from about 30 mm to about 60 mm.

13. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the poly(vinyl alcohol) fibers are soluble in water above 65 °C, and insoluble in water below 65 °C.
14. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the poly(vinyl alcohol) fibers are soluble in water above 90 °C, and insoluble in water below 90 °C.
- 5 15. The fabric of claim 1 wherein, after step c, the web has a thickness of from about 0.3 mm to about 0.6 mm.
16. The fabric of claim 1 wherein, after step c, the web has a base weight of from about 40 g/m² to about 100 g/m².
- 10 17. The fabric of claim 1 further wherein the poly(vinyl alcohol) fibers are carded along with other fibers selected from the group consisting of polyester, polypropylene, polyethylene, rayon, cellulose, nylon, and ethylene/(meth)acrylic acid copolymer.
18. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the method further comprises, after step c, adhering a substantially impermeable layer to the web.
- 15 19. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the method further comprises, after step c, adhering a substantially impermeable layer to the web, wherein the layer is polyethylene, polypropylene, polyester, or ethylene/(meth)acrylic acid copolyester.
- 20 20. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the method further comprises, after step c, contacting the web with a liquid selected from the group consisting of isopropyl alcohol, water, methyl ethyl ketone, methyl propyl ketone, and acetone.
21. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the method further comprises contacting one or both sides of the web with an aqueous finishing formulation to impart water repellency to the fabric.
- 25 22. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the method further comprises, before step c, contacting one or both sides of the web with an aqueous finishing formulation to impart water repellency to the fabric.
23. The fabric of claim 1 wherein the method further comprises, before step c, contacting the web with an aqueous finishing formulation to impart water repellency to the fabric, wherein the resulting fabric comprises:
- 30 a. from about 0.01 to about 3 wt. % fluorocarbon; and
- b. from about 0.01 to about 20 wt. % wax.

24. The fabric of claim 1 having a tensile strength in the machine direction greater than 13 pounds, and a tensile strength in the cross direction greater than 13 pounds when measured for a one inch strip according to ASTM D5035-95.
25. The fabric of claim 1 having a bursting strength greater than 8 psi when measured by ASTM D3776-96.
26. The fabric of claim 1 having an air permeability of greater than 150 CFM/sq. ft. when measured by ASTM D737-96.
27. The fabric of claim 1 having a flammability rating of IBE or DNI when measured according to ASTM D1230-94.
28. The fabric of claim 1 having a water impact penetration less than 1.0 grams when measured by AATCC 42-94.
29. The fabric of claim 1 configured into a surgical fabric selected from the group consisting of gowns, drapes, and protective apparel.
30. The fabric of claim 1 configured into an absorbent pad.
31. The fabric of claim 1 configured into an absorbent pad selected from the group consisting of gauze, swabs, towels, and wipes.
32. The fabric of claim 1 configured into a wipe that is at least 25% saturated with a solvent.
33. The fabric of claim 1 configured into an air filter.
34. A fabric comprising a poly(vinyl alcohol) fibrous web, wherein:
- a. the fabric is nonwoven;
 - b. binding adhesives are substantially absent from the fabric;
 - c. heat fusion is substantially absent from the fabric;
 - d. needlepunching is substantially absent from the fabric; and
 - e. stitchbonding is substantially absent from the fabric.
35. A method of finishing a poly(vinyl alcohol) fabric to impart water repellence to the fabric comprising contacting the fabric with an aqueous finishing formulation, and subsequently drying the fabric and/or curing the finishing formulation at a temperature above the water solubility temperature of the poly(vinyl alcohol).

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